



The Insider

www.senate.mi.gov/switalski

Inside State Politics with State Senator Mickey Switalski Senate District 10

April 15, 2005

Welcome to the electronic version of *The Insider*. I would like to take the opportunity to thank you for your support and giving me an opportunity to represent you in the Michigan Senate. It is my sincere hope that this bi-weekly e-newsletter will keep you informed of the happenings in Lansing while staying true to the traditional style of *The Insider*. If you would like to contact me, please feel free to e-mail me at senmswitalski@senate.michigan.gov or call me at my Roseville or Lansing office. You can also meet me in person during my constituent hours, coming to a library near you. Call my office and make an appointment or just walk in. See schedule for details.

Mickey's Letter Bag: Diesel Tax

Dear Senator Switalski,

I noted with much interest the article in last Friday's Detroit News regarding the Ten Commandments (House Bill 4433) display bill. This is another GOP smelly bill much like the "Shall Carry" bill that citizens didn't get to vote on. According to the article, 450 (75%) of the people in the survey said they supported displaying the Ten Commandments. This is not a good representation of the population of our state.

Where was this survey taken? In the western part of the state? Or in all counties. I don't know anyone around Macomb that was called. I go to the Warren Community Center every day for Aqua Aerobics and no one there has even heard of this bill. This smells like another GOP plan to pay back the Christian Right for their campaign donations.

Regarding the diesel tax; I feel that those that drive pleasure vehicles should pay all of the tax. Commercial vehicles such as large trucks or those that drive a diesel to make a living, should be excluded via a rebate for what ever they had to pay above the present tax. Sure it means more paper work but I know a couple people that thought they were smart by buying a diesel to avoid paying a few cents of road taxes. That's when diesel was a lot cheaper than gas.

Sincerely,

Ebert Hansen
Sterling Heights

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Dear Senator Switalski:

I believe you are ON TRACK with eliminating the "Diesel Discount". It is the heavy trucks that do the most damage to the roads, therefore they should shoulder the same burden (maybe more!) that other drivers do. I don't think that the \$.04 per gallon discount is sufficient incentive to truckers to offset the damage to the roads.

Regards,

Ed Debler
Sterling Heights

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Dear Mickey:

We agree that truckers should not get a discount on fuel tax, especially since the trucks are rough on the road. Thanks for sending your newsletter.

Caroline & Mike Butkiewicz
Sterling Heights

Mickey's Blog: Worker Rights In Need of Protection

A Michigan company made national headlines last year for instituting a policy that would make smoking an act subject to termination of an employee.

Weyco Inc. is a health benefits administrator based in Okemos and had offered programs that encouraged its employees to take better care of their health, which include smoking cessation programs and gym memberships. These efforts were done to help cut down on the company's health care costs.

Sounds like a reasonable action by the company and it should be commended. Long term thinking on health care is something that needs to be done more often by government and employers. But Weyco went one step further.

Weyco announced a policy that, effective on January 1, 2005, any employee who tested positive for nicotine would be terminated from their job. The policy also stated that it would exclude smokers from being hired. The zero tolerance policy on nicotine includes smoking during the employee's free time, such as at home or in their vehicles.

Many people quit smoking as a result of the programs offered by the company. But four employees were not rid the habit. The employees were dismissed from their jobs at Weyco. The company countered that they left willingly.

I believe that the company has broken new ground in attempting to regulate employee's legal behavior outside of the workplace. While it is true that smoking is unhealthy, it is another matter to say that employers can discharge workers for legal activities outside the workplace.

I believe that they have gone too far. Does this mean that companies can discipline or fire employees for being obese? For having bad genes? For having asthma? For frequenting casinos? For failing to regularly attend church services? I think that you would agree that this is a very dangerous precedent.

I also believe that the Legislature should be cautious when intruding into private employer-employee relationships. But what happens if this relationship goes too far and extends into a person's private time away from work?

I co-sponsored Senate Bill 381, a bill that would prohibit the termination or discrimination of an employee on the basis of the legal activities that he or she engages in outside of their workplace, during nonworking hours.

The bill provides for numerous exceptions such as when the action presents a bona fide occupational requirement, creates a substantial conflict of interest with the core mission of the employer, or is an activity that is illegal under state or federal law.

I look forward to the debate on the merits of this bill. Let me know what you think about this matter.

What do you think? Combating Steroid Use in Athletics

The use of performance-enhancing substances in athletics has been widely publicized lately.

A few weeks ago, Congressional hearings were held about its use in professional sports. The discussions culminated in an agreement between Major League Baseball and the players' union over toughening the penalties for violators.

The problem is so pervasive that President Bush even mentioned it during his State of the Union address.

Since the new standards took effect, 38 minor league players were suspended for violating Major League Baseball's Minor League Drug Prevention and Treatment Program against the use of performance-enhancing substances. Former Tigers outfielder and current Tampa Bay Devil Ray Alex Sanchez was suspended 10 games for an undisclosed violation of the policy.

The fight to combat the use of performance-enhancing substances in athletics has now come up for debate in the Michigan Legislature with the introduction of a package of bills designed to combat its use amongst high schoolers.

House Bill 4118 would require school boards to adopt a policy that states the use of performance-enhancing substances such as steroids would affect a student's eligibility for participating in athletics. The bill would also require that the Department of Community Health develop and maintain a list of banned substances consistent with what the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) bans and make it available to school districts.

In addition, House Bills 4594 and 4595 would prohibit the possession of steroids within 1000 feet of the drug-free zone at parks and schools. Steroids are already banned on school grounds.

Supporters say that the legislation would bring attention to a very serious issue amongst athletes. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, steroid use has more than doubled among high school students from 1991 to 2003. They contend that athletes look for many ways to excel and some will look to steroids for a competitive advantage over their opponents while ignoring the significant side effects of its usage.

Does this legislation go far enough to protect the safety of our children? Would it be more effective to have random steroid testing for student athletes? Is this an issue where if the schools are unable to police themselves due to finances, should the state get involved?

The bills are currently in the House Education Committee where they are currently awaiting consideration. I would like to hear your views on this matter. Let me know what you think and I will publish some of the letters in the next issue of the Insider E-Newsletter.

Peace of Mind Books Available

Regardless of your personal feelings about the way the Terry Schiavo situation was handled, one thing that can be learned from this episode is the importance of making a will and clearly designating what kind of medical care one would want if they are incapable of making their own decisions. I have Peace of Mind books available in my office which includes a Living Will, Durable Power of Attorney, and Advanced Medical Directive forms. These forms are not advisory and are legal documents. I encourage you to fill one out. If you would like to receive a Peace of Mind book, please email me with your name and mailing address.

Mickey's TV Insider Show

Check out my TV Insider Show coming to a television station near you. Watch me interview local guests about politics, life, issues and concerns to our district.

Sterling Heights

Every Saturday and Sunday at 12:30 p.m.
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Utica

Every Wednesday at 9 a.m.
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Clinton Township

Last week of every month- Sat thru Thurs
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Roseville

Every other Tuesday at 6:05 p.m.
(Comcast Channel 18)

*Please note that Sterling Heights/Utica/Clinton Township will show the TV Insider Show on Comcast Channel 5 and Wide Open West Channel 10. Clinton Township will air the TV Insider Show at various times during the last week of every month. Roseville can see the TV Insider Show on Comcast Channel 18.

Coffee Hours

*Please note that since the District Office is in Roseville, I do not have set coffee hours in Roseville. However, I encourage you to visit the Roseville office. We even have a coffee pot. Everyone is welcome to attend the coffee hours and discuss their issues and concerns.

April 25 7-9 p.m. Location: Clinton-Macomb Public Library (35891 South Gratiot, north of 15 Mile) Clinton Township	May 2 7-9 p.m. Location: Sterling Heights Public Library (40255 Dodge Park) Sterling Heights
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